



National Disabled Veterans *Winter Sports Clinic*

Skier Profile

Clinton Hale – Going Strong After 24 Years!

For Clinton Hale, a 61-year-old combat Veteran of Vietnam, attending the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinics is reason to both celebrate and reflect. Twenty-four years ago, Hale participated in the very first Clinic on the slopes of Colorado's Powderhorn Mountain, and the camaraderie he discovered there has brought him back every year since. "The friendships you make here are forever," Hale said. "Some of the greatest people in the whole world are here...and they are all real heroes. They really get you pumped up." Even after 24 years.



While Hale loves the thrill of downhill skiing, he sees an even deeper, more challenging reason to participate. "I'm competitive and enjoy sports, but the Winter Sports Clinic is true rehab." Hale, who lives in Mary Esther, Fla., is quite familiar with challenges. An 18-year Air Force veteran, he was injured while engaging in an 'airfield seizure package' – an exercise where troops parachute in to take control of a runway. A paraplegic, he uses Canadian crutches to get around and skis using a mono-ski. Recalling his early years attending the event, Hale said, "You see those mountains and think, 'how the heck am I going to do *that*?' But by the end of the week, the mountain is conquered. The challenges are both mental and physical. You have to prepare yourself to want to do it, and then pursue it with vigor."

Hale has seen many changes in the Winter Sports Clinic over its history. "There are more people, veterans with more severely traumatic injuries, and improvements are made every year." Hale thinks that perhaps the greatest improvements are in the type of adaptive equipment used by the Veterans. "At my very first Clinic, I skied downhill in what looked like a kayak with a tarp draped over my legs, and used short ski poles called 'picks.' These picks did not have a cutting edge, which made for sloppy turns and increased the likelihood for wrist and shoulder injuries."

"Today, this state-of-the-art equipment we use meets the needs of people with varying abilities," Hale said. "Now, they can adapt a piece of equipment to get any Veteran skiing." So, what's to look forward to after 24 years? For Clinton Hale, it is giving back to others what has inspired him over the years. "I want to leave knowing that I touched just one person, letting them know that their life may have taken a different path but it is just starting, and will be just as challenging."

Miracles on a Mountainside!

